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RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA IMMEDIATE 3666
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE 2083
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA IMMEDIATE 0656
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL IMMEDIATE 1262
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SUBJECT: CORREA'S FARC COMMENTS SPARK EXCHANGE WITH GOC

REF: QUITO 02457

Classified By: PolOff Jarahn Hillsman, Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

11. (C) Reaction to presidential front-runner Rafael Correa's recent declaration that he does not consider the FARC a terrorist organization has drawn in the Ecuadorian Foreign Ministry and the Colombian government. Colombian President Alvaro Uribe did not respond to Correa's comments directly, but repeated that the FARC are terrorists, while noting that coca cultivation had increased along the Colombia-Ecuador border since the GOC suspended fumigation operations at GOE request. Foreign Minister Francisco Carrion responded that the Colombian government is Colombia's only legitimate representative, but insisted the GOC respect GOE wishes that aerial coca fumigation remain suspended within 10 kilometers of the Ecuadorian border, pending a definitive study of adverse health effects on Ecuadorians. End Summary.

Correa Clarifies on FARC

12. (U) In a press interview and again during a presidential debate on October 5, presidential candidate Rafael Correa said that he does not consider the FARC a terrorist organization, but rather "guerrilleros," fighting a war with the Colombian military that the GOE had no part of. Going further, he declared that his classifying the FARC as a terrorist organization would be tantamount to involving Ecuador in Colombia's civil conflict, and would also give the U.S. authorization to "invade" Ecuador (see Reftel). Under direct questioning by the press, Correa has since claimed he is not supportive of the FARC, but simply opposes involving Ecuador in Colombia's internal problems.

Uribe's Response Pointed

13. (U) According to Ecuadorian press reports, Colombian President Alvaro Uribe refused to comment directly about Correa's remarks, saying the government of Colombia respects Ecuadorian sovereignty and would address the issue after the elections. However, on October 7, from Putumayo province, Colombia, Uribe told the press that the suspension since 2005 of aerial eradication efforts in the 10-kilometer border zone between Ecuador and Colombia had led to the replanting of over 8,000 hectares of coca. In what many here are calling an indirect response to Correa's assertions, Uribe reportedly said that the Colombian government cannot allow the 8,000 hectares of coca to continue funding the FARC's terrorist

activities while peace is being pursued by the GOC. Uribe said he would contact President Alfredo Palacio to discuss a solution.

FM Parrot's Party Line; MFA Privately Concerned

¶4. (U) FM Carrion on October 6 distanced the GOE from Correa's primetime remarks on the FARC. Carrion told the press that the Colombian government is the GOE's only "legitimate" interlocutor in Colombia. Abiding by the GOE's longstanding non-interference policy, however, Carrion stopped short of characterizing the FARC.

¶5. (C) MFA Director General for Border Relations with Colombia, Claudio Cevallos, on October 10 expressed concern to PolOff that bilateral relations with Colombia could become strained under a Correa government. Cevallos said that Correa's radical ideology and personal arrogance could lead to inflexible positions on sensitive issues with Colombia, possibly undermining progress on a wider range of bilateral issues. Correa's recent statement associating the FARC with "legitimate liberation movements is ridiculous and dangerous for the nation," he said. Cevallos explained that the GOE considers the FARC to be an irregular armed group, a classification that allows Ecuador to maintain positive relations with Colombia while avoiding direct confrontation with the terrorist organization.

Fumigation Still Sensitive

¶6. (U) Uribe's remarks from Putumayo province prompted an immediate response from the Foreign Ministry. FM Carrion told the press Ecuador's position insisting that aerial fumigation be suspended pending definitive study of adverse health effects on Ecuadorians had not changed. Carrion added that he was confident that the Colombian government understood Ecuador's concerns over the environmental and health implications of glyphosate.

¶7. (C) Privately, Cevallos expressed concern to PolOff that Uribe's statement could signal GOC intentions to renew aerial coca eradication within 10 kilometers of the Ecuadorian border. Any such unilateral GOC move would affect Ecuador's domestic politics at a particularly sensitive time, offering an opportunity for leftist presidential candidates to take a harder line against Colombia. Reviving the issue during the election campaign could also undermine bilateral cooperation, which was essential to prevent the FARC from gaining greater access to Ecuadorian territory. Cevallos said the GOE was against participating in the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission's (CICAD) phase two study on the effects of glyphosate. The GOE had rejected the scope and results of the initial CICAD study, he said, and would continue to push its pending request for further scientific studies by the United Nations.

Comment

¶8. (C) Correa's FARC comments appear to have generated sufficient reaction to force him to "clarify" and moderate his views on the FARC in interviews and political rallies over the past week. Correa's brash politics have even some of the most difficult Ecuadorian diplomats concerned over future relations with Colombia. On the fumigation issue, the GOE is clearly boxed in by its own extreme position, but is privately concerned that Colombia might re-open the issue. Any unilateral move to spray during elections would very likely provoke the GOE, and certainly Correa, to rally nationalist support against the GOC.

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